NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS
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The Dedication of Hampton National Historic Site

On April 30, outside of Towson, Maryland, not far from Baltimore, there occurred an event of some special interest to the National Trust and the National Council. It was the dedication of the Hampton National Historical Site, and the reasons for our interest are made apparent in the texts of the brief talks that follow. There was a direct connection between the movement to preserve Hampton and the movement that resulted in the incorporation of first the National Council and later the National Trust.

The remarks of Mr. Robert Garrett, who served as a member of the Executive Board of the National Council from its inception until last fall, of Mr. Newton B. Drury, Director of the National Park Service, of Mr. David E. Finley, Chairman of the Executive Board of the National Council and newly elected Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Trust, and of the Honorable William Preston Lane, Jr., Governor of Maryland, also give point to the efforts that are today being made to preserve our historic heritage. Their words re-emphasize and reiterate the fact that there is a significance to this movement that transcends a single point of time, as well as a single locale.

Behind the scenes a great many people worked to make possible the ceremony on the last day of April when the administration of Hampton was given over to the Society for the Preservation of Maryland Antiquities. The restoration of Hampton was the work of the National Park Service, which will retain title to the property. An idea of the teamwork that is necessary to accomplish good restoration is made apparent in the listing of the National Park Service personnel most directly concerned with the Hampton project. Overall supervision was the work of Ronald F. Lee, Chief Historian, and Thomas J. Allen, Director of Region One. (Both Mr. Lee and Mr. Allen were among the founders of the National Council.) The architectural direction was given by Charles Peterson and Dick Sutton. The museum phases were handled by Ned J. Burns, Paul Hudson, and Ralph Lewis; the landscape architecture by Robert G. Hall and H. J. Hanson; the history by Dr. Charles W. Porter; the legal phases by Donald E. Lee; the engineering by Edwin C. Kenner; and the project supervision by James Rader and Walter F. Berrett.

It is, then, the cooperative efforts of many people that makes possible the preservation of a site or building significant in American history and culture. And it is this principle that will guide the National Trust and the National Council in their work in the future.

Introductory Remarks by Robert Garrett
President, Society for the Preservation of Maryland Antiquities

May I offer a cordial welcome to all present. It is gratifying to have so many come to witness the dedication of Hampton to the public use.

Representing the Society for the Preservation of Maryland Antiquities, it seems to be appropriate to say that we are especially happy to be entrusted with the care and use of Hampton and it is hoped that many persons and organizations from Maryland and also from other states will enjoy it greatly.

When it was determined at long last that Maryland should establish such a Society as ours and it was found in 1946 that others had endeavored to do the same thing in 1931, and that these persons had kept their Society alive, we quickly put the two groups together and began to work earnestly. It was evident that there was need of an important project to excite the interest of many people and thus show that the Society is real and alive, and learning that Hampton might be available, we soon worked out an agreement with the National Park Service which had taken over the property through the generosity of Mrs. Mellon Bruce.

This agreement started us at scratch but as time has passed during the period of restoration of the house and certain work on the grounds and garden, we have been greatly encouraged by the demonstration of interest which has included gifts of many kinds.

I want, however, to take advantage of this opportunity to express the gratitude of our Society to the members of the Hampton Committee that was set up quite a while ago. It would take too long to mention everyone by name and to indicate their respective tasks. I can assure you, however, that they have done an enormous amount of work and have accomplished many things, some of them apparent and others that can only be imagined. Mr. John H. Scarff is the Chairman of this committee. He insists on calling himself Chairman Pro Tem, but in view of what he has accomplished and the time he has given to the task, I would change that designation and call him Chairman for All Time.

Another thing of major importance has been the completion, plus a surplus, of our side of the challenging proposal of the Avalon Foundation that they would put up $18,000 if we could do likewise in money, in kind, and in services, for the improvement of the garden and grounds. Very much to our gratification, a major part of our side of this proposal was contributed by the National Park Service which was able to find a substantial sum of money that could be allotted to this Matching Fund.

I must now come to the introduction of the speakers of this afternoon and it is my pleasure to present to you Mr. Newton B. Drury, Director of the National Park Service.

Mr. Drury has been of enourmous help in many matters relating to the restoration of Hampton and he and Mr. Arthur E. Murray Demaray have been responsive to any approach we have made. I am sure we could not have reached the point at which we now stand if it had not been for their deep interest and cooperation, and that of their immediate associates, whom I cannot but should like to name to you.

I shall now present Mr. Drury, whose subject is "Dedication of Hampton as a National Historic Site".

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Your Excellency, Governor Lane, Other Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

For the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior, I am glad to join you here today in ceremonies dedicating the Hampton National Historic Site. We feel that we are literally surrounded by willing workers and generous friends. The Hampton project, from the start, has been a joint or collaborative enterprise, and represents an excellent relationship between state and national interests. Few undertakings of our Service have had such spontaneous and enthusiastic backing from so many far sighted and history-conscious persons.

For the National Park Service, the Hampton project has been something of an experiment in cooperative endeavor. Already the custodian of 171 areas, totaling about 21,000,000 acres, including the greatest scenic areas and many nationally-significant historic properties of the Nation, and faced with a heavy backlog of needed construction and needed improvements dating from the war and postwar period of restriction, the National Park Service obviously was not in a position to preserve Hampton unaided.

We were, however, reluctant to see one of the great architectural monuments of the early American Republic lost to the American people and offered to use our skills in historic house restoration and park planning, and Federal funds as could be made available in order to insure the preservation of Hampton for public use. Through the generosity of the Avalon Foundation, established by Mrs. Ailsa Mellon Bruce, through the understanding help from Mr. Donald D. Shepard, and through the cooperation of Mr. and Mrs. John Ridgely of Hampton, the mansion and grounds were donated to the people of the United States in 1948. The Avalon Foundation also contributed most generously to the restoration of the Mansion and its furnishings.

The National Park Service, for its part, allotted some appropriated funds to assist in the restoration of the house, to build parking areas, and to restore roads within the Hampton grounds. National Park Service engineers, experts in architectural restoration, landscape architects, historians, legal counselors, and our administrative staff gave to the project of their time both during and long after working hours. The total contribution of the Service, while an intangible figure, is, we feel, to be reckoned in terms of the overall success of the Hampton restoration.

The project also owes much of its success to the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings, many of the members of which became directly associated with the work at Hampton. For the Council, Mr. David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art, has devoted himself without stint to this project. Baltimore County, Maryland, made a significant contribution in paving the road from Dulaney Valley Road to Hampton gate.

However, all of these contributions and efforts would have been to no avail but for the assurance that some organization would maintain and administer Hampton for public use. This assurance, so vital to the project, was given, at the start, by the Society for the Preservation of Maryland Antiquities, whose members have contributed liberally of their time, energy, and thought as the work of restoration and development has proceeded. I want, through Mr. Robert Garrett, President of the Society and Mr. John Scarff, its Secretary, to thank the many members of the Society who have given such constant attention to Hampton problems. I wish that I could name them all.

The Society for the Preservation of Maryland Antiquities, therefore, is the key organization in the preservation and exhibition of Hampton, which it is my pleasure to help dedicate today to the enjoyment and inspiration of the American people. In grateful recognition of the cooperative role which the Society will henceforth play as the administrator of Hampton, I take pleasure in presenting to you, President Garrett, this document. It is the cooperative agreement signed by Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman, officially designating the Society as the custodian of the Hampton National Historic site. It is our hope that you and members of the Society may find lasting satisfaction in this important service to the American people.

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Mr. Garrett: I now have the privilege of presenting to you Mr. David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

May I say that my guess is that Mr. Finley is the real instigator of the Hampton project. It was he, I believe, who worked out with Mr. and Mrs. Ridgely the purchase of the two Sully portraits, one of them being the famous Lady with the Harp, this portrait representing Eliza Ridgely, and the other Charles Carnan Ridgely, her father-in-law, who was Governor of Maryland early in the XIX Century. These paintings have been hanging now for some years in the National Gallery and my belief is, subject to correction, that Mr. Finley's visits to Hampton in that connection resulted in the proposal to the National Park Service that it should take over Hampton, and it may well be, though I am not telling any secrets for I do not know them, that he was instrumental in securing the interest of Mrs. Ailsa Mellon Bruce, resulting in the large appropriation by the Avalon Foundation for this purpose. If my suspicions are true, we must thank Mr. Finley for all that he has done in our interest.

Mr. Finley's subject is "The Role of Hampton in Historic Preservation".

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Today marks the culmination of more than six years of effort on the part of many people in this audience to preserve Hampton as one of the great architectural and historic monuments in this country. The preservation of Hampton is closely allied with, and indeed, is partly responsible for, another important event that will take place tomorrow morning in Washington. I refer to the organization of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which has been chartered by the Congress and will become operative tomorrow when its Trustees hold their first meeting and establish their headquarters in the Octagon House in Washington.

Hampton, as you will see, had something to do not only with the founding of the National Trust, but also with the establishment of the Trust's parent organization, the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings; and I think it might amuse you if I should digress for a moment and tell you how this came about.

For more than a hundred years there hung in one of the rooms at Hampton a full-length portrait, painted by Sully in 1818, depicting a young girl in a white dress, playing a harp. The subject was Miss Eliza Ridgely, who married her cousin, John Ridgely of Hampton, and is known throughout the art world as "The Lady with the Harp". Sully's portrait of Mrs. Ridgely has always been a famous picture; and when I went one day about six years ago to Hampton to see it, the present Mr. John Ridgely very kindly let me see not only this painting and his other treasures, but he also showed me Hampton, so appealing in its beauty and dignity, and practically unchanged in the midst of its rolling acres after more than a hundred and sixty years.

Mr. Ridgely, however, knew that its integrity as a great country house was seriously threatened by encroaching developments from the neighboring city of Baltimore. He told me of his desire that Hampton should become a national monument and saved for future generations as an outstanding example of Eighteenth Century American-Palladian architecture. He was very generous in offering to do what he could in helping to bring this about, so when I got back to Washington, I talked with Mr. Drury, Mr. Demaray, and Mr. Ronald Lee of the National Park Service and found that their admiration for Hampton fully equalled my own.

In due time Providence intervened, using as its instrument a patriotic and generous and far-seeing lady, Mrs. Mellon Bruce who, with Mr. Paul Mellon and Mr. Donald Shepard, the other trustees of the Avalon Foundation, arranged to give Hampton and its gardens to the National Park Service, all to be held in trust for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people. So, at last Mr. Drury, Mr. Demaray, Mr. Lee and I were completely happy or should have been; but like most people in our positions, we determined to go on to bigger and bigger things.

The Park Service had long felt the need for a national council composed of interested, able, and influential persons and organizations, such as are represented here today, who are in a position to rally support for the rescue of important sites and buildings threatened with destruction.

In April 1947, a meeting was held in the National Gallery in Washington, attended by distinguished leaders in the fields of history, architecture, archaeology and government, who then and there organized the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings, with headquarters in Washington and with the avowed purpose of bringing nationwide support to the work of historic preservation. The National Council is an affiliated group composed of about forty national, regional, state and local organizations, six ex-officio representatives of the Federal Government, and a number of interested and distinguished individuals, who have joined together to further, through voluntary efforts, the preservation and interpretation of sites and buildings significant in our history.

The Council and its constituent organizations sponsored the bill which was passed by Congress a few months ago, establishing a National Trust for Historic Preservation, with a charter from Congress authorizing the National Trust to hold and administer properties in much the same manner as does the British National Trust.

Our National Trust is now in position to supplement the excellent work being done by the National Park Service in the field of historic preservation. The Trust can accept the gift of important architectural and historic monuments, provided means can be found for their support and operation by qualified organizations, as has happened in the case of Hampton. In this instance, as you know, Hampton, which is the property of the Federal Government and administered by the National Park Service, is operated by the Society for the Preservation of Maryland Antiquities, under the able leadership of Mr. Robert Garrett, and other patriotic and devoted members of this splendid organization. This Society, as well as the Garden Clubs of Maryland, the Colonial Dames, and other organizations and individuals, such as Mrs. Wallace Lanahan and Mr. Gilman Paul, have already made gifts and loans to Hampton which, with the generous gifts from Mrs. Bruce and the Avalon Foundation, and from Mr. and Mrs. John Ridgely of Hampton, have restored this beautiful old mansion to its pristine glory, as you will see today for yourselves. The results achieved at Hampton will furnish the pattern which will be followed, we hope, by the National Trust in preserving other architectural and historic monuments in this country.

In establishing the National Trust, Congress, itself, pointed out that "it is particularly important to encourage this kind of undertaking at present, when so many of the values represented by our national heritage are being challenged from abroad." Congress has here pointed out one of the most compelling reasons why we should redouble our efforts at this time to preserve the fabric of our own American civilization.

Historic preservation is not merely an agreeable and worthwhile activity, but also one that plays an important part in the fight to preserve our American way of life from an alien, retrogressive, and totalitarian philosophy that would destroy it, if it could. In this fight, which is indeed a fight for the only kind of world that is fit to live in, organizations such as your Society for the Preservation of Maryland Antiquities and other preservation societies and historic house museums, such as Hampton, can play a useful and important part. You and others like you in all parts of this country are helping to keep alive a healthy respect for our past and its achievements, spiritual as well as material.

We, in this country, have no reason, as some less fortunate nations have, to fear the past and for that reason to repudiate it in the mistaken belief that everything can be built better from new foundations. On our Archives Building in Washington, we have cut in stone the words, "What is Past is Prologue"; and we say that with pride, having confidence that in America we can build better for the future because we shall do so within the great and living tradition we have inherited from the past.

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Mr. Garrett: It is especially appropriate that we should have as our next and final speaker, the Governor of Maryland, the Honorable William Preston Lane, Jr.

While Hampton belongs to the Department of the Interior of the Federal Government, it is a project of especial interest to this State. Also I should remind you that while the Society for the Preservation of Maryland Antiquities is a private organization, it is incorporated under the laws of the State, and under our by-laws the Governor is eligible for membership in the Society ex-officio. Governor Lane has accepted this election but I want to call attention to his real interest in the subject in that long before he became Governor, he accepted membership in our predecessor society, which as I have said, was formed in 1931.

The Governor's subject is: "Why Preserve These Historic Places?"

It is particularly fitting that I, as Governor of Maryland, should come here today to participate in these notable ceremonies dedicating "Hampton" as a national site. For a squire of this fine mansion, Charles Carnan Ridgely, was from 1816 to 1819 my predecessor in that office. Thus I have the honor and distinction of paying tribute to him as one of the early chief executives of the state.

Why do we preserve these places? Why not, instead, permit the forces of progress to engulf and replace them? One may well ask whether the loss in tax revenue is justified; whether the continued existence of such places as this is at all desirable. There are many sentimentalists who will shudder at those questions. But what does the great mass of the people think? What interest have they in "Hampton"? or in the Hammond-Harwood House at Annapolis, or the state house, or in any number of places large or small which throughout the country comprise the total of our national heritage?

These are all fair questions. To which there is, it seems to me, a simple answer. I am not an antiquarian; I have no particular knowledge of nor reverence for old things or old places for their own sake. Indeed, like most of us modern Americans, my personal recollection of historical facts and figures is at best inexact. And yet the feeling of history and of events which comes to mind, the vague impression of historic events taking place, the impression of major consequence in the evolution of this nation which these places mark upon the visitor, cannot be denied.

Many of you have visited Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington; Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson; Stratford and Arlington, the homes of Robert E. Lee, - all happily, preserved for the nation. Others have visited the extraordinary restoration at Williamsburg, Virginia, the mansions of Natchez and the James River, and other smaller but equally significant places whose distinction lies not so much in the personalities and accomplishments of their original owners as in the impressions which they create of a way of living in our early history and of a type of culture, refinement and good taste prevalent among the founders of the colonies.

None of you who have visited these places can have come away without some profound reaction of gratification for being part of a nation built upon such foundations. None of you can deny that these places are an essential and indispensable part of the nation's heritage of greatness.

Some of you may, perhaps, have found, at one of these places, your own answer to a major question many are asking today: "What made this nation great?" "Why is the United States today the great leader and defender of the freedom-loving peoples of the world?" Certainly it is not the mere bricks and mortar of these places. It is not the site upon which the edifice stands. Nor the interior furnishings nor superb carvings. Nor the pictures on the walls.

And yet it is all of those and more. For these historic treasures are an important part of the very fabric of the nation. These are the foundation stones upon which the colossal structure of free enterprise was built and has thrived. These were the nurseries from which sprung the incomparable force which free men can muster against any threat to their freedoms.

Yes, these places, no less than the parchment upon which is written the Declaration of Independence, are the nation's heritage. No less than the envelope on the back of which the immortal Gettysburg Address was scribbled by Lincoln; no less indeed than the fabric on which the Magna Carta is inscribed.

So why do we preserve these places? Not for the materials comprising them. We care not for the ink, the paper, the parchment nor the bricks and mortar. Nor for the design as such. But we treasure and must ever defend and safeguard the ideas and principles for which they stand. For these things are our greatness and our strength. They are the very bastions of our freedom.

Without these fundamentals ever before our consciousness; without religious freedom, without freedom of the press, without the right of trial by jury, without the bill of rights and our established constitutional protections against despotism, autocracy, dictatorship and the police state, we are fair prey for the alien ideologies which constitute the greatest threat to our existence as free men today.

These things were born in our historic places and they were defended on our historic battlegrounds.

I am profoundly grateful to note the great increase in popular interest in the preservation of our incomparable heritage. The staggering popular reception which greeted the freedom train on its extraordinary nationwide journey, the ever increasing crowds of visitors at our historic shrines and the growth of local and national organizations devoted to this work are sources of much reassurance that we shall not waste our historic substance, that we shall not ignore the lessons of our past, and that we shall indeed revere, treasure and defend all that has made us what we are.

The past is but the prologue of the future.

May the efforts of those concerned with the preservation of "Hampton" find full and enthusiastic public support in the awakening of popular realization of the true, practical value of what they do here.

May this place, this Hampton National Historic Site, leave each who visit it with a greater appreciation and gratitude for the priceless privilege of American citizenship.

And may I, as Governor of Maryland, express my gratitude for the generosity which has brought this project to fruition and the work which will keep it permanently safe as a continuing inspiration for the people of Maryland and of the nation. This is, indeed, a notable part of our nation's heritage.